

Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment: A Handbook (and an Autistic Manifesto)

by Julie Dind | Issue 11.2 (Fall 2022), Crip Pandemic Life: A Tapestry

ABSTRACT During the Spring semester 2020, I took an art class at the Rhode Island School of Design. “Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment: A Handbook” was my final project for the class. Part zine, part Zoom performance experiment, part autistic meltdown, the project bears witness to my anger, isolation and fear during the lockdown. It is both a commentary on academia and the constant demand to “make use” of every experience—to continue academic life as usual even during a pandemic that saw so many disabled people die—as well as a handbook for making one’s own Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment (PPPDE) at home and an absurdist manifesto. As a research-creation project, the Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment offers a snapshot of a moment in (crip) time, that of the first state-sanctioned lockdown and of the early days of the pandemic.

KEYWORDS pandemic, Zoom, autism, neurodivergence, zine, PPE



< <https://csalateral.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Dind-Cover-Image-julie-Dind.jpg> >

Figure 1. In the zine version of this work, this image served as the cover. For the connoisseurs, this is Eric Gjerde's origami spread hexagons tessellations, made from unbleached parchment paper. I was once one of the youngest members of the French Origami Association. Photograph by author.

Introduction

During the Spring 2020 semester, I took an art class at the Rhode Island School of Design.

"Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment: A Handbook" was my final project for the class. Part zine, part Zoom performance experiment, part autistic meltdown, the project bears witness to my anger, isolation and fear during the lockdown.¹ It is a commentary on academia and the constant demand to "make use" of every experience—to continue academic life as usual even during a pandemic that saw so many disabled people die, as well as a handbook for making one's own Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment (PPPDE) at home, and an absurdist manifesto. Against a cultural conversation that presented art-making as a way to "stay sane" during the lockdown, the Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment (PPPDE) asks, what of those of us who were never sane in the first place?

Part I: Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment: A Manifesto

- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment cares about disabled lives.
- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment cares about the environment.
- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment cares about elephants, cats, and hedgehogs.
- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment was created by proudly Autistic hands.
- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment was created by tired Autistic hands.
- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment refuses to make art to stay “sane” during the pandemic.
- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment was never sane.
- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment believes that during a pandemic, Maya Deren would have thrown her fridge across the room instead of making films.
- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment refuses to see disabled lives, vegetable peels, or weirdness as disposable.
- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment worships weirdness.
- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment worships daikon.
- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment worships Weird.
- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment believes in the spirit of *mottainai*.²
- The Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment believes you should stay the fuck home.³

Part II: *Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment: A Handbook*

To create your own Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment, you will need:

- *One organic purple daikon. Its length should correspond to approximately half the height of your face.*
- *A large sewing needle.*
- *A kitchen knife.*
- *Scissors.*
- *Thread, preferably linen. In any case, you should use thread made of natural fibers.*
- *Compostable unbleached parchment baking paper.*



Figure 2. Profile portrait of a woman with long hair. She is looking straight ahead and holding a purple daikon in her hand, in front of her face. Photograph by author.

Step 1

Start by peeling your organic purple daikon, using a kitchen knife. Make sure to leave some purple daikon flesh on the peel.



Figure 3. Caption: Still life of a purple daikon with one lengthwise section peeled off.
Photograph by author.

Repeat until your organic purple daikon is fully peeled. Set the flesh aside.



Figure 4. Another still life of the purple daikon with five sections peeled off, lengthwise. Photograph by author.

Step 2

Lightly salt your purple daikon peel on the fleshy side, and arrange it on a sheet of compostable unbleached parchment baking paper. Allow it to dry for approximately 48 hours.



Figure 5. Five slices of purple daikon peel, drying fleshy side up. Photography by author.

Step 3

You are now ready to start assembling your Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment. First, start by arranging your purple daikon peel in an aesthetically pleasing way.



Figure 6. Purple daikon peel arranged peel side up.
Photograph by author.

Then, using your needle and linen thread, you can start sewing the purple daikon peels together. Your peels should overlap, and you should avoid sewing too close to the edge.

Repeat until you obtain a rectangle large enough to cover your face, from your chin to your nose.





Figures 7 & 8. There is something almost surgical about the act of stitching daikon peel. The stitches on the purple daikon peel remind me of the large scars on my partner's legs, which themselves remind me of large caterpillars. Photographs by author.

Step 4

Your Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment is now almost ready to be worn!

At this point, it should look like this:



Figure 9. Five slices of purple daikon peel, sewn together. Photograph by author.

Using your thread and needle, create ties so that you can attach the mask to your face. Since linen thread is not elastic, you will have to fold your ears to put your mask on.

Your mask should be tight enough so that it fits your face closely, but not too tight so that it does damage your ear cartilage. Your finished mask should look like this:



Figure 10. The stitched-together daikon with thread added as ear-loops to make it possible to wear as a mask. Photograph by author.

Congratulations!

You are now the proud owner of a Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment.



Figures 11–13. Three photographs featuring a woman wearing her Personal Protective Daikon Equipment, from different angles. Photographs by author.

For optimal freshness, you should use your Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment within 48 hours of its creation. After use, allow your PPPDE to dry. It can later serve as an infusion.

Remember that disabled people are routinely denied access to ventilators.

Stay the fuck home.



Figure 14. In the zine version of this work, this image served as the back cover. For the connoisseurs, the paper is folded according to Eric Gjerde's "Five-and-Four" tessellation. Photograph by author.

As a last step, you can fold the compostable organic unbleached parchment paper on which you dried your organic purple daikon peels.

Afterword

At the beginning of the pandemic, my mother sent me a handmade mask, made of red shoelaces, thick floral upcycled fabric, uneven stitching, and all of a mother's concern. A gesture of care sent across an ocean.

Over the course of the pandemic, I would accumulate more masks. First, fabric masks, whether bought, gifted, or handmade. I would even spend long hours sashiko-stitching a mask that would never be worn beyond the walls of my room: by the time I was done stitching, official recommendations had shifted to single-use masks.

As this project nears publication, my relationship to masks has changed: I got vaccinated, caught COVID (despite diligently wearing a mask every time I left my apartment), semi-recovered, got boosted, and even recently bivalent-boosted. As I revise these lines, sitting in a coffee shop near the university, not a single face around me is masked. “Staying the fuck home” stopped being an option for me when classes restarted in person. At this point in time, wearing a mask became optional, and although I became less diligent with wearing one, the pack of single-use masks I carry with me everywhere I go acts as a reminder that the pandemic is not over, not for all of us, and certainly not for many disabled and neurodivergent people. For many in my community, masks becoming optional comes with non-optional consequences.

As a research-creation project, the Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment offers a snapshot of a moment in (crip) time, that of the first state-sanctioned lockdown and of the early days of the pandemic. For Natalie Loveless, research questions, which are at the center of research-creation, set up a “dialogue with the world.”⁴ The world with which the PPPDE project was in conversation has changed, and the dialogue has lost some of its currency.

Some of the physical iterations of the PPPDE have dried out and been preserved: they crossed an ocean to get to Norway, where they exist on one of my partner’s shelves. Some of them got moldy in the drying process and have been discarded long ago.

With time, masks and the (un)availability of masks became less of a concern. As the pandemic continues to evolve, what we are lacking isn’t masks anymore, but rather people willing to continue wearing them. Documentation of the project remains, as evidence, as a snapshot of a moment in (crip) time, as a meltdown turned zine—though the physical zine did not exist until months after the end of the lockdown, once I left my apartment and returned to the university and its printer.

This project existed—briefly—in the same time-space as my origami cranes project: for the first few days of the lockdown, in the space of my room, I folded a paper crane for each COVID case in the state of Rhode Island. I ended the project after approximately 1000 cases, 1000 paper cranes, and 3000 minutes spent folding time. It was still early April 2020, but the exponential increase in positive cases meant I ran out of origami paper, out of energy, and realized I would soon run out of minutes in a day to continue folding at the rate of daily COVID cases.



Figure 14. Documentation of the origami project, and inadvertent documentation of my work space.
Photograph by author.

In her book *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*, Loveless engages “the question of how to make *art* at the/an end of the/a world (as we know it.”⁵ As a research-creation project, the Personal Purple Daikon Equipment similarly engaged the question of how to make art—as part of an art *class* —in the middle of a global pandemic which felt—and continues to feel—like the end of a world, a crisis that affects my community disproportionately.

Despite the pandemic, despite the fear of getting sick while alone in a foreign country (I am an international student), despite the stress of my routine being disturbed (though, unlike many others, the pandemic did not have a major impact on my—mainly inexistant—social life), I was enrolled in an art class, and hence still had to create a project. This is not something I blame on my professors: in the middle of the pandemic, they were also still expected to work, and hence had to have us create projects.

In many ways, being a doctoral student made me one of the lucky ones during the pandemic, since I had the option to “stay the fuck home,” an option that was never afforded to many other disabled and neurodivergent people. And yet, in these first few days of the pandemic, everything felt uncertain: whether I would be able to remain in the United States

as an international student after my university made the shift to online classes, whether I would be able to come back and finish my degree if I decided to return to my home country, whether it was safe to take an airplane in the middle of a pandemic in the first place. For the most part, my support network was an ocean away.

To the institutional question of what my final project would be, the PPPDE answers with a different set of questions: what would it take to make the university care about disabled lives more than it cares about final projects? If art is supposed to “help me” during the pandemic, can it make masks miraculously appear? And if art is supposed to help us “stay sane” during the pandemic, what of those of us who were never sane in the first place?

After reading all this, you might still wonder: what does Maya Deren have to do with this?⁶ Aside from the fact that I am obsessed with Maya Deren, someone asked me as I was taking the class, “What would Maya Deren do during the pandemic?” The expected answer was that Maya Deren would have created a film, turned the pandemic into art. After all, this is what artists are expected to do. To tell the truth, I still don’t know what Maya Deren would have done. I know what I did, though: I had an autistic meltdown, and created the PPPDE, as well as a potato peel variation.

For *Loveless*, “Art, as a practice of aesthetic micro-political re-attunement, encourages resilience and imaginative worlding, not by offering more facts but by finding ways, through aesthetics encounters and events, to persuade us to care, and to care *differently*.”⁷ The PPPDE project, then, might well represent my attempt to care—and make others care about my community—*differently* and *autistically*.

You can also experience the [zine version of this project through Issuu < https://issuu.com/drawingennen/docs/pppde_by_julie>](https://issuu.com/drawingennen/docs/pppde_by_julie), or through [this PDF < https://csalateral.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/PPPDEfinalZine.pdf>](https://csalateral.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/PPPDEfinalZine.pdf).

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Notes

1. An autistic meltdown is an intense reaction to being sensory overwhelmed. For me, it feels both like wanting to withdraw from a situation AND internally feeling like throwing my fridge across the room like Maya Deren once did. See footnote 6 on Maya Deren. ↩
2. The Japanese expression *mottainai!* could be translated as "What a waste!" and is used to express displeasure about wasting. The spirit of *mottainai*, then, is to recognize the value of things and treat them with respect and care. The spirit of *mottainai* translates in my project in a desire not to waste beautiful daikon peel, not to waste (my) weirdness, and not to waste my time trying to stay "sane" during a pandemic when I perhaps never was. ↩
3. This line of my manifesto references another manifesto, the "Self-Quarantine Manifesto." For more on this, see <https://staythefuckhome.com/>. ↩
4. Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 97. ↩
5. Loveless, *How to Make Art*, 105. ↩
6. Maya Deren was an American experimental filmmaker and is considered the "mother" of the American avant-garde. My partner, Rolf Gerstlauer, and I are obsessed with her work and created a film in homage to her titled *Weird Drawn at Land*. According to Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren once threw a refrigerator across her kitchen; sometimes, this is exactly what I wish to do. ↩
7. Loveless, *How to Make Art*, 107. ↩

Author Information

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Julie Dind is an autistic doctoral candidate in Theatre Arts and Performance Studies at Brown University. Her research interests lie at the intersection of performance studies, disability studies and philosophy. Her work autistically explores Autistic modes of performance. She is a butoh dancer, one half of the autistic-artistic couple Gerstlauer & Dind, and the proud creator of the Personal Protective Purple Daikon Equipment (PPPDE).

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